Wanted—
A Chaperon

Howard Chandler Christy

"'Oh, must you, aunty?' wailed Lydia"

(See page 5)

Wanted—A Chaperon

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WANTED: A CHAPERON

OF all the millions who at one time or another have been compelled to burden their memories with any of the initials and figures used in naming the streets of New York, Lydia Greenough is probably the only mortal who thoroughly approves of the system. Question any one else as to its wherefore, and he or she, with either a moan or a curse (dependent, it is to be hoped, on the speaker's sex), would explain that, in a year now fading from

the recollection of even its oldest inhabitants, a stupid surveyor and a foolish board of aldermen fastened upon the city of New York a method of street-numbering of surpassing inconvenience, which, with other moans and curses, its residents and its transients have since been forced to endure. But Lydia maintains that the system is admirable, and if the opportunity to plead its merits were but granted her, she would undoubtedly convince at least the masculine half of the metropolis that she is right, however wrong the system; which is merely one way of saying that Lydia is young and charming.

It was by the veriest chance — indeed, veriest of chances — that the much ma-

ligned method gained this powerful advocate. Lydia, if now asked, would doubtless assert and believe that it was all preordained, and never could have been otherwise. Yet, as a matter of fact, if on that Christmas eve a wild snow-storm had not been driving and drifting through the misnumbered streets, it never would have been. Or, if Mrs. Travers's maid had not taken to her bed with a quinsy sore throat, it never would have happened. Or, if the little country girl had been more used to city ways, and had stood less in awe of the liveried servants, it could not have occurred. In short, but for half a dozen contingencies, Miss Greenough would have completed her visit with her city relatives, and

returned home to settle once more peacefully into the life of her native New England village, with never a thought or even a dream of the destiny that might have been, and with not one word of defense for the system which henceforth commanded her warmest advocacy.

It must be acknowledged that Mrs. Travers's arrangements for that evening left a goodly chance for Dame Fortune to intervene, and she is a lady who seldom misses an opportunity, be it golden or otherwise.

"It's snowing and blowing worse than ever," she announced, — not Dame Fortune, but Mrs. Travers, — sticking her head into the room where Lydia was dressing, "and it really seems to me I'd

better telephone Mrs. Curtis that you can't come."

"Oh, must you, aunty?" wailed Lydia, her mouth drawn with disappointment.

"Do you truly want to go out in such fearful weather, child?" marveled Mrs. Travers, giving a little shiver, though the room was warm. "It's only a dinner, after all, and you'll surely catch a frightful cold, or worse."

"Why, aunty, if I were home, I'd probably be taking a sleigh-ride, or skating," eagerly asserted the girl, "and I never catch cold. I don't believe I even can. Oh, please, please let me go!"

"Well, if you really would rather, it's very much better, for there is hardly

anything worse than to fail a hostess, though I presume she'll have a lot of gaps, anyway, in such a storm." Mrs. Travers walked to the window, and pulling aside the thick curtain and the shade, looked out. "It's such a horrid night, and the snow's getting so deep, that I think I'll telephone Mrs. Curtis, after all, and — "

"Oh, aunty!" once more wailed Lydia.

"Wait, child, till I finish! Telephone her, asking if you may not spend the night. That will be much better for you, and it will save the horses from being kept waiting. I hate to have them out such a night, and if Winwood only had the common decency to keep well, I'd

have had a carriage from the livery-stable, rather than expose — "

"That will do just as well, aunty, really it will," interjected Lydia.

"My dear! Do you think I'd trust you with any one but our own coachman, since I can't send my maid with you?"

"I don't see why not."

"Gracious! my dear, how inexperienced you are!" sighed her aunt. "I must go and telephone first, but then I'll explain to you why it would n't be right or proper."

With this remark, Mrs. Travers departed, leaving her niece to worry over the extent of her ignorance of social conventions while she went on with her prinking.

This most important and fascinating employment was brought to a finish just as Mrs. Travers returned. "Yes, child, it 's all right," was her announcement as she entered the room; "so put what you 'll need for the night into a bag. It's too bad Winwood is n't here to do it for you. These modern servants!"

"She 'd only be in my way," declared the girl, busy with the packing. "I 'd much rather do it myself."

"And you look beautiful, my dear," said Mrs. Travers. "How can you do your hair so prettily without a maid?"

"But I have a maid, aunty," laughed Lydia, merrily, "and one, moreover, who takes much greater pains to make me look nice than any one else possibly

could. There! Do you think Winwood could have done that any quicker?" she ended, holding up the bag.

"Winwood! Why, Lydia, she simply breathes idleness. If you only knew how I am tried and — but there, I must n't begin on that, for it would take hours, and you must be starting, for it will take longer than usual to drive there because of the drifts, and then I don't want the horses to be kept waiting a moment longer than need be."

"What did you say was the number?" asked Lydia, hurriedly putting on her wrap.

"19 West Seventy — there, that 's what I 'm always doing! I say East when I mean West, and West when I

mean East. Mrs. Curtis lives at 19 East — no, no, child," she broke in, "don't you carry the bag; of course Morland must bring it down. Ring twice, as I have told you."

"I 'm sorry, aunty, but it 's so hard to get used to being waited on," apologized the girl, as she obeyed Mrs. Travers's instructions. "And it really takes more time; you know it does."

"But we must keep them busy, or they are simply ruined. Take Miss Greenough's bag to the carriage," she ordered, once the servant arrived, and then led the way downstairs.

"You did n't finish giving me Mrs. Curtis's address, aunty," Lydia reminded her, as they descended.

"She threw open the door, letting in . . . a flurry of snowflakes"

(See page 21)

—Howard Chandler Christy

"Oh, yes. 19 East Seventy — now, did I say Seventy-second or Seventy-third when I read you her note this morning?"

"I am certain you said Seventy-second, because I remember thinking that four times eighteen is seventy-two, and so I only had to take my own age and multiply it by four."

"Yes, you are right, and I ought to have known it, for Mrs. Washburn lives at 19 West Seventy-third, so of course it must be Seventy-second. Well, kiss me good night, my dear. I hope the first dinner will be everything that you — why, how you are shaking, child!"

"It 's only excitement, aunty. Were n't you frightened and nervous and eager

and — oh — everything over your first dinner-party?"

Mrs. Travers smiled. "It's so long ago I've even forgotten, Lydia. But don't mention dinner-parties or any other parties to-night. There are dinners and dances and receptions in New York, but never parties. Every one will know you are from the country if you speak of parties."

"Oh, I'm so glad you told me, and I do hope I'll remember," exclaimed the girl, with an alarm in her voice suggestive of murder or arson rather than a fear of recognition of mere country breeding. "Is there anything else I should n't do?"

"Here's Morland to put you in the carriage, and the horses must n't be kept

waiting," answered her aunt. "Don't worry, my dear," she added in a whisper. A girl can do nothing amiss if she only —" Mrs. Travers artfully paused to kiss her niece twice, and then ended, "only is as pretty as you are."

Preceded by the footman, and well-nigh swept off her feet by the wind, Lydia went down the steps as quickly as possible, and entered the carriage. The servant, after placing the bag beside her, tucked the fur rug carefully about her feet, and then asked:

"Where to, Miss Greenough?"

"Oh, I forgot. Thank you, Morland. To — to 19 West Seventy-second, please."

The door slammed, and with an effort

that tested the goodness of the harness, the horses started on their toilsome drag through the drifts. Lydia, trembling half with the cold and half with excitement, tried to lean back, but the carriage rocked and jounced to such an extent as to make the position impossible, and so, sitting well forward and holding the arm-slings tightly, she steadied herself as best she could.

"Let me see," she cogitated, "I must not say 'Yes, sir,' or 'Yes, ma'am,' to any one, and I must n't thank the servants when they pass me things, but just say 'Yes,' or 'Not any,' and I must n't speak of parties, and — oh, dear! I'm sure aunty told me something else I was not to do! Oh, yes; I must always say 'a

friend,' or 'a man,' or 'a woman,' or 'a girl,' but never 'a lady friend' or 'a gentleman friend,' for that's the way shop-girls and servants talk."

With such thoughts and worries the girl sped the slow drive, or rather jolt, for such in truth it was. Twice the halting of the carriage made her think the destination was attained, but each time one glance out of the window served to show her that they were in the middle of the street, and the pause was merely to breathe the horses. At last, however, after a third halt and then a series of backings and advances, they brought up close to the curb, with a final jar that seemed to declare an intention of never again departing from that spot.

With a quickness born of both her own impatience and her aunt's fear for the horses, Lydia threw open the door and alighted. Although the wind had swept the sidewalk in front of the house fairly clean of snow, yet the suspicions of a more experienced diner-out would have been instantly awakened, for there was no man awaiting the carriages, no awning or even carpet, and, most telltale of all, the flight of steps was but a smooth slide of snow. But the country-bred girl gave not one thought to any one of these eloquent facts, and intent only on pleasing Mrs. Travers by not keeping the horses standing, she hurriedly closed the door, and said, "That 's all, thank you, Thomas."

"An' what time shall I call for yez, miss?" questioned the coachman, the words coming faintly through his thick fur collar.

"You are not to come for me, Thomas, for I'm to spend the night here with Mrs. Curtis."

As the carriage turned out into the middle of the street, Lydia crossed the sidewalk, and not without a struggle, for her gloves, fan, bag, and skirts took both her hands, slowly waded, more than climbed, the snow-laden steps.

No response came to her first ring, or to her second one, but her third proved an open sesame, for the door was swung back by a man-servant, who appeared

somewhat startled or surprised when Lydia stepped into the hall.

His face and manner made this so evident that it could not escape Lydia's observation; but before she could determine what it meant, she saw his eyes, which were wandering over her, fasten with real amazement on the bag in her hand.

"Mrs. Curtis knows that — my aunt telephoned Mrs. Curtis, asking if I might spend the night," she hurriedly explained.

The servant, who still held open the door, blinked at her. "Whodishyou-shay?" he asked, with a manner curiously mixing an attempt at dignity and an intense friendliness.

"My aunt, Mrs. Travers; and Mrs.

Curtis answered that I might," responded Lydia, vaguely anxious.

Still with dignity, somewhat lessened by an obvious leaning upon the handle, the man slowly closed the door. The difficult feat accomplished, he said, "Shidown," accompanying the recommendation with a sweeping motion of his arm toward the hall settle, which made him stagger. "Shidown, an' I'll ashk Misher Murshon."

"Who is he?" interrogated the girl, frightened into a direct question.

"Misher Murshon? Who'sh Misher Murshon?" echoed the man, so incredulously as to make Lydia fear she had committed some unpardonable social slip or was declaring her country origin.

Then he smiled — in fact, beamed — upon Lydia, as, answering his own question, he continued, "Misher Murshon's finesh of men."

"I don't understand — there must be some mistake. Is n't this Mrs. Curtis's?"

"I shaid this Misher Murshon's."

"No, you did n't," denied Lydia, desperate with fright. "What number is it?"

"Number?" repeated the man, foggily, much as if the girl had propounded a conundrum.

"Yes. What number is this house?"

"Oh, yesh; number," he replied, once more smiling. "Thish 19 Wesh Sheventy-shecond."

"Oh," moaned Lydia, sinking back

on the settle, "and I told Thomas 19 East Seventy-second! And now I'll be late to the dinner, and aunty said there was nothing worse!" As this thought flashed into her mind, she sprang up, and catching at the handle of the door, threw it open, letting in a wild burst of wind, which brought with it a flurry of snow-flakes. "Oh, the carriage is gone!" she cried despairingly. "What am I to do?"

"Shidown, shidown," reiterated the servant. "Misher Murshon 'll know whatsh do. Ish all right." Turning, he walked along the hallway, steadying himself, as he went, by a hand on the wall, until he disappeared through a doorway.

Had Lydia been more versed in this world, she would have seized this oppor-

tunity to escape into the street, even though her foot gear consisted of slippers and worsted overshoes, and her gown and wraps were absolutely unfitted for the storm. As it was, she closed the door, and stood waiting the return of the man, with the courage of ignorance and of necessity.

The first development was not of a character to lessen her anxiety.

"What do you mean, Richards, by getting into this state?" demanded a gruff masculine voice, angrily.

No reply reached the ears straining so eagerly to hear, but one was evidently essayed, for, after a slight pause, the same voice continued:

"Nonsense! You are not in a fit

condition to do your duties, and you need n't try to hide it. You 've taken advantage of my helplessness, and my having to trust the keys to you."

Once more the angry voice ceased, and a moment's stillness ensued; then it began again:

"If you are not tipsy, why can't you tell me what it is you are trying to explain?"

The longest time of apparent silence followed, terminated finally by the same speaker, who, in a far louder but no less angry voice, called:

"Will who ever is out there please come in here?"

Lydia faltered and flushed and paled before she could screw her courage to

the acting-point; but some proceeding was necessary, and after an instant's hesitation she hurried along the hallway and passed through the door. It was a somber-looking room that she entered, unlighted save by a smoldering wood fire, and by a single oil-lamp, so shaded as to cast its rays only on a book in the hands of some one lying on a lounge.

"Zish ish zhe young laish, Misher Murshon," announced the servant, whose figure the girl could just make out in the gloom as she entered.

The recumbent person made a movement, as, in the now familiar accents, he said, "My fellow here has been drinking, and I can't make out from him what the matter is."

"I 'm — oh — I 'm so sorry to trouble you; it 's all a dreadful mistake, but Thomas brought me to the wrong house, and has gone away, and — and what am I to do?" Lydia's closing wail was dangerously near turning into tears, but the last word was uttered with only a break of the voice.

At the first sound of the girlish tone, the man reached up and turned aside the shade, so as to light up the room; and by the change the interloper found herself in the presence of a man of perhaps thirty-five, seemingly an invalid, for his face was pale and was resting on an ordinary bed-pillow, while a gray shawl was over his body.

"Well," he questioned, with a distinct

suggestion of impatience, "can't you walk there?"

"It's 19 East Seventy-second street, and it's storming terribly, and the carriage did n't stay, and I've only slippers on, and I'll spoil my dress, and I don't know the way," sobbed Lydia, giving way to tears as she catalogued her accumulation of difficulties.

"Now don't be silly and cry," protested the man, half gruffly and half frightened. "Sit down there, and we'll fix it all right."

"Oh, will you?" cried Lydia, gratefully, even through her tears. "Thank you, oh, thank you so much!"

"I suppose you're not too drunk, Richards, to run an errand," remarked the

master, bitingly. "I do think you might be trusted once without abusing my confidence."

"Misher Murshon, youshmosh unjush," responded the servant, in an injured tone. "When you shen me for champagne, acshident took plashe. Firsh bosshle broke, and while I shelecks anosher one, I breashe fumesh. Perfeshly shober, bush a lilly dizhey, zhash all."

"Then bring me that pad and a pencil from my desk," ordered the master, and when the two were in his hands, he wrote a brief note, and held it out to the servant, with the direction, "There, take that to Burton's livery-stable at once."

"Yesh, Misher Murshon; zish in-

shant," meekly answered Richards, as he hurried from the room with all the haste consistent with his efforts to walk steadily.

"Why don't you sit down?" questioned the host, curtly, once more motioning toward a chair.

"Had n't I better go back to the hall?" suggested Lydia. "Then I sha'n't interrupt your reading."

"Nonsense! Sit down!" he reiterated.

Afraid to object further, the girl took a chair, remarking, "Thank you very much; and please don't mind me, but go on with your book."

"I was reading only from sheer ennui," growled the man. "I sprained my ankle

last week, and have nearly perished of boredom ever since."

"I'm so sorry," said Lydia, with genuine sympathy in her words. "Does it hurt you much?"

"Only when I try to walk. But for that I'd have gone for a carriage myself," he had the grace to explain, softened a little apparently by her manner, "instead of sending that good-for-nothing beast."

"I'm very glad — that is, I mean — I should have been very sorry to have you put yourself out for me."

"I'm only afraid that fellow will take longer than need be," was the muttered explanation.

Absolute silence followed, the host evidently having nothing more to say,

and the guest being too timid to attempt conversation. But presently the heat of the room led her to open her fan, and this small act served to vivify it anew.

"If you're hot, why don't you take off your cloak?" he suggested. "At the best, the carriage can't get here under ten minutes."

"Thank you, I will, for I'm very warm," acceded Lydia, throwing back her wrap with real relief.

"You were on your way to some social frivolity," he remarked, more assertion than question, as his glance took in the dainty frock and the pretty bared arms and throat.

"Yes; to a dinner-party — there, I said it!" moaned Lydia.

"'You've never drunk champagne before?' he inquired"

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"Said what?" questioned her interlocutor, surprised at her consternation.

"I — why, aunty told me," stammered the girl, blushing, "that if I spoke of dinner-parties, people — every one would know I was from the country."

"And are you from the country?"

"Yes," acknowledged Lydia, straightforwardly, though coloring a little.

"And why are you ashamed of that?"

"I 'm not ashamed of it," denied the girl, warmly.

"Then why did you object to people knowing that you were?" persisted her relentless interrogator, smiling.

It was a cruel question, and Lydia faltered an instant, but, collecting herself, she replied quietly, yet with real

dignity: "I feel no shame at living in the country, for it is nothing to be ashamed of; but when I am in the city, I wish to behave as it is customary, and so I was mortified at speaking of parties after my aunt had cautioned me not to use the word."

"Bravo! That's the way to feel, no matter what people say," exclaimed the man, approvingly. "Pray tell a social ignoramus why society objects to the word 'parties.'"

"I don't know; but aunty said that people only speak of dinners and dances and receptions, and never of parties, and that they'd think me countrified if I talked of them."

The man threw his head back and

laughed heartily. "Is n't that just like the collection of donkeys and geese and parrots who make up 'society'?" he said. "They do nothing but heehaw and quack and gabble about house-parties and coaching-parties and yachting-parties, but of course the word is low, vulgar, plebeian, and countrified when it is applied to the ordinary uses given in the dictionary. However, I 'm grateful to you for enlightening me, for I 'm not very experienced, and it would have been an awful mortification to me had I made a slip in such a vital matter as the latest edict concerning social slang."

"But aunty told me no well-mannered person ever used slang," objected his

listener, very much mystified by the irony.

"I 'm not much of an authority on the subject, but I think good manners and fashionable life have little intimacy. As for the latter's taboo on slang, it extends only to the vernacular of other circles, for its own lingo is as cheap and common as any it forbids."

"Not really!" marveled the girl, incredulously. "Now what, for instance?"

"Not being an expert, I can only reply at random; but take such words as 'bud,' 'belle,' 'wallflower,' 'smart,' 'swell,' and a lot of similar ruck, and you 'll see —"

The completion of the speech was cut short by the entrance, without any previous knock, of a very tall and stout

woman, who announced her advent with the demand:

"An' will yez be afther havin' yere dinner now, Misther Murchison, or wait till it 's spiled intoirely?"

The question asked, she stuck her arms, which were bared to the elbow, akimbo, and stared fixedly at Miss Greenough.

"Richards is n't back, is he?"

"Divil a bit."

"Then dinner must wait."

"All roight, sor; but don't be blamin' me, sure, if it 's burnt to a crisp," retorted the cook, impertinently.

"Oh, it 's too bad for me to spoil your dinner. Please don't let me prevent your having it," begged Lydia.

"That's roight, miss," agreed the cook, approvingly. "It's sick Oi am thryin' to cook for the loikes av him, that niver will ate his food whin it's ready. Toime an' toime ag'in he's so took up wid his chimicals or books —"

"That's enough, Monica," interrupted the master, sharply. "You may go back to the kitchen."

With a shake of her head and a muttered something of disapproval, the servant obeyed, just as the clock on the mantel began striking.

"You are witnessing some choice examples of a bachelor's housekeeping, are you not?" observed Mr. Murchison.

"I — I beg your pardon," apologized Lydia, with a start. "I was trying to

count the time, and so — what did you ask me?"

"It is just eight," he told her, after a look at his watch.

"Is it really?" sighed the girl, forlornly. "How long will it take to drive to East Seventy-second?"

"Usually about fifteen minutes, but it will be nearer half an hour if the snow is bad. What time was your dinner?"

"Half-past seven."

"Well, if the carriage comes within ten minutes, you'll only be a little more than fashionably late, so there's no occasion to look so funereal." Just as he finished, a bell sounded, and he added: "There's Richards now, and from the time he's

been, he ought to have brought a carriage with him."

Both listened so intently that they could hear the distant footsteps of the cook as she went to the basement door, and the creak and the slam as it was opened and closed, even the indistinct murmur of voices, succeeded after a time by the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs; and Monica appeared in the doorway.

"It 's Richards come back, sor," she announced; "an' he wint to two stables, an' they both said they 'd not sind no carriage out in this blizzard for no wan."

"And why does n't he come and tell me so himself?"

"Sure, an' I don't think he could git upstairs."

"He's been drinking again?"

"An' he has that same," acceded the servant. "Och, but the smell of the whisky 'most knocked me over whin I opened the door just now."

Something Mr. Murchison said under his breath as, tossing the shawl aside, he gingerly put his feet to the floor and sat up. Then aloud, "Hand me my crutches — there — in the corner," he directed, when the cook stood still.

"An' what do ye want wid thim?" she questioned, standing stolidly. "For ye need n't think I'll be afther bringin' thim to ye, if ye're goin' to do wan stip more than walk to the dinin'-room."

"Nonsense! Do as I tell you," ordered her master.

"Nary crutch do I bring, unless ye promise to moind the docthor."

"You will obey my order at once," he reiterated, quietly but sternly.

"Och, for the love of the blissid saints! Misther Murchison, be good now!" whimpered the woman, though she made not the slightest motion of obedience.

The invalid turned to his visitor. "Will you please bring me those crutches over there in the corner?"

"Don't ye do it, miss," counseled the Irish woman, "for he's that set an' obstinate that—"

"Be still, Monica," broke in the man, really irritated. "You don't—"

"An' is it be still ye 'd have me?" indignantly retorted the maid. "Very well. Oi 'll be still, an' let ye go yere own way, an' foine work 't will be." She crossed the room and came back with the crutches. "Theer!" she snapped, as she held them out to him, "thry walkin' the shtreets in this snow. Thry if ye can so much as git down the front stips in this wind. Listhen to it howl. Och, foine sport ye 'll have of it!"

"Oh, she is quite right," urged Lydia, joining her plea to that of the servant. "It is blowing so that it is all one can do to stand up, and the steps are a foot deep with snow."

While she was speaking, the invalid took the crutches, and by their help suc-

cessfully struggled to his feet, and now stood upright, propped upon them. The joint protests, however, were sufficient to give him pause, and his face showed evident indecision for a brief space before he said, "Then will you go for a carriage, Monica?"

"Av coorse Oi will, if that will satisfy ye," assented the cook, "though Oi don't see what use 't will be if they won't send wan, an' the dinner 'll be spoilt intoirely by the toime Oi git back, if Oi 'm not froze to death goin' or comin'."

"It 's dreadful to put you to so much trouble," grieved Lydia, "and now it — it — really is n't necessary. You said it would take over ten minutes to get a carriage here, and half an hour to drive

there, and now it's quarter past eight, so at the best I could n't get there till nearly nine o'clock, and the dinner will be over by that time. So please let Monica give you your dinner before she tries to get a carriage."

"That's roight, miss, an' the sinse ye have av it; for it's sure the policeman will be in for a bit av a sup—" Monica caught herself up sharply, coughed, and then went on hurriedly — "that is, it's me cousin promised he'd thry to bring me word this evenin' av how me — me niece was, that's sick wid a terrible cold; an' whin he comes, Oi'll just make him foind a carriage for ye, an' it's himself can do it."

"There, you see," joyfully cried the

country girl, her brow clearing. "That will save all the trouble."

"And what about you?" questioned Mr. Murchison.

"Me?" Why — I'll just sit here and read something until the carriage comes," explained Lydia, guilelessly.

"And go without any dinner?"

"Oh, that's nothing," she responded. "I'll not mind a bit, really."

"But I can't have that," objected the host. "Don't you see it's impossible?"

"Av coorse it is," chimed in Monica. "It's sit down an' have a good dinner along wid the masther ye will, sinsible loike."

"But I'm not in the least hungry, truly," lied Lydia, earnestly.

"It's impossible for me to have my dinner, and you go without," asserted Mr. Murchison. "Don't you see it is?"

Lydia colored and looked doubtingly, first at the woman and then at the man.

"I 'm afraid — it — would it be proper?" she questioned, her face once again wrinkled with anxiety.

"An' av coorse it would be, miss, an' a good dinner ye 'll have; an' foine it will be for the masther to have a bit av company, afther his bein' so sick an' solitiry," affirmed the cook, heartily.

"I — I 'm not used to — to city ways," faltered Lydia, "and — oh, dear! I don't know what is right! What do you think

I ought to do?" she appealed to Mr. Murchison, throwing herself on his honor.

Her question transferred some of the wrinkles of her forehead to his and he hesitated, frowningly, before he spoke. "Look here," he replied, "I've got an apology to make, and I want to make it before I answer you. When you first came in here, I thought you were one of those silly New York society girls who pretend to be innocent and helpless, because they think that 's the way to catch the men, but who really know the world, good and bad, about as well as those twenty years their seniors. Believing this, I thought you could take care of yourself as well as need be, and so I was

curt and rude, and I'm sorry and mortified."

"Please don't talk like that," broke in the girl, "for you 've — for I know how much trouble I've given you all, and you 've been most kind."

"I say this much as a preliminary because I wanted you to feel in advance that you were n't being asked to dine by an ogre. If, now, you were one of the girls I mistook you for, I suppose you would n't dine with me under the present conditions. That 's because they import their manners, as well as their gowns, from France, and Johnnie Crapeau is such a gentleman that convention ordains that a woman must never be left alone with him an instant. But, as a

fact, the American woman knows that she's absolutely safe with the American man, and she does n't pay the least heed to the decree, except this society woman, who would n't either, if it were n't French. Is n't that so?"

"I—I don't quite know what you mean," she replied.

"Where you came from was it wrong for a girl to go off driving or sleighing with a man, and to be alone with him for several hours?"

"No," acknowledged Lydia, a little reluctantly.

"Then I don't see why you should n't dine with me."

"But I knew them well—and always had known them," she objected.

The man smiled as he said pleasantly: "And I have n't even a family Bible to vouch for me. Well, my name is Allan Murchison, which is equivalent to saying that I was born a Scotchman, and the Standard Chemical Company would give me a first-class recommendation, if they thought I needed it, either as a man or as a chemist. Monica here will go bail for my conduct as a domestic animal, which" — Mr. Murchison gave a little laugh — "is more than I can do for either of my domestics. Now, don't you think this information and her presence are guaranties enough?"

"An' sure, miss," interrupted the cook, once again putting in her tongue, "don't ye fear wan minute to do it, for the

masther 's a gintleman, if ever theer was wan, or it 's not mesilf would desave ye if he was n't."

Poor Lydia glanced about the room, as if seeking further counsel from something before saying, "I 'm afraid I 'm very foolish, but I really don't think I ought. It — it somehow does n't seem right — and something tells me that aunty would think it very wrong."

"Then of course you are not to do it," Mr. Murchison told her, and taking the crutches from under his arms, he resumed his seat on the lounge.

"Oh, but won't you please have your dinner, just as if I was n't here?" besought the girl. "I 'll just sit here and read something."

To prove the good faith of her offer, she caught up a magazine from the little table.

Mr. Murchison laughed with real merriment. "Hold on," he said; "I 'll have a forfeit with you. If you'll promise honestly to read that, — that is understand it, — why, I 'll eat my dinner alone; but if you don't read it, as you said you would, why, then you must dine with me. Is it a bargain?"

"Why, yes. I 'll agree to that," consented Lydia, welcoming any loophole of escape, though a little puzzled to know what he meant.

"Now light the reading-lamp and see what you 've promised to read," requested the man, laughing once more.

Obediently the girl turned on the electric light on the table beside her, and, raising the magazine, glanced at the title. "'Chemisch-Technisches Repertorium,'" she read out questioningly, with an admirable German accent.

"Oh," ejaculated the man, his laughter visibly waning, "you know German, do you? Well, which of the articles are you going to read?" he questioned quizzically.

Miss Greenough ran her eyes down the table of contents, and then she smiled, as she answered, with a touch of archness, "I think this 'Darstellung von substantiven Baumwollfarbstoffen aus Derivaten der Dinitrooxydipheny-

lamine,' by a man named Allan Murchison, sounds interesting."

"And are you going to try to make me believe you can understand that rubbish," demanded Mr. Murchison, the smile all gone, "and so escape paying the forfeit?"

Lydia gave a triumphant little laugh. "My father is a doctor, Mr. Murchison, and he's taught me all the chemistry he knows, and I'm very much interested in it; indeed, I could n't have found anything that interests me more. So you see you must pay the forfeit, and eat your dinner, while I sit here and read."

"Oh!" was all the response the chemist vouchsafed, thoroughly taken aback and crestfallen. Then, man of his

word, he turned to Monica. "You may give me dinner as soon as it is ready."

"Ready," grunted the cook as she started to leave the room. "Ready some of it's been this twinty minutes, an' it's not mesilf is to blame if —" There her grumbles died away out of the hearing of the two.

To emphasize the agreement, Lydia slightly shifted her chair to bring the light properly, and, opening the review, began reading.

To this absorption Mr. Murchison made no objection, but, settling back on the lounge, he calmly examined his unexpected visitor, who, thanks to the newly lighted lamp, was now for the first time clearly visible to him. In her dainty

frock, the gift of her aunt, and far exceeding in fineness anything she had hitherto even dreamed of, the girl made a charming picture; but Mr. Murchison scarcely noticed it, giving his whole attention to her face. It was one most people gave attention to, with its clear eyes, studious rather than alert, and its rather low and thoughtful forehead, all suggesting in some way that they were more interested in what was being thought than in what was being seen, and each in curious contradiction to, or at least strange mates of, a very youthful-looking mouth and chin, and a wilderness of little curls, boldly standing forth or timidly hiding themselves, flyaway or nestling, single and in couples, decking

the temples, or kissing the little ears and the slender neck, and all seemingly uttering a mute but most eloquent protest at the tyranny of combs and hair-pins. The spectacle was a novel one to the solitary bachelor, and was made all the more unusual and interesting because those eyes were reading an article of his, and he noted each change of expression, however slight, and tried to divine from it how far she had progressed and how much she was interested.

It is not to be supposed that Miss Greenough could long remain unaware of this fixed scrutiny, and as consciousness grew she found it more and more difficult to keep her attention fastened upon what she was reading, and to

keep from stealing a glance toward the sofa to assure herself that she was being watched. This latter desire presently became so strong that only by a distinct exertion of the will was she able to resist it, and, try her best, her thoughts would not keep themselves centred in those strange German letters and terrible technical words. She held her eyes determinedly on the text, however, and turned the pages at what she thought was the proper interval of time.

"Now, honestly, do you understand it?" questioned her host suddenly.

Although the interruption was a relief in that it allowed the girl to raise her eyes, the inquiry was disconcerting, and the temptation to fib was strong; but

after a moment's embarrassment Lydia answered frankly:

"I have n't been able to comprehend it."

"Then under our compact you will have to dine with me, won't you?" broke in Mr. Murchison.

"I was going to explain," went on the girl, "that my mind won't concentrate on it at present; but I believe, if the conditions were different, I could read it, abstruse as it is. And when I am home again I shall write and get a copy, that I may really read it."

"You need n't take that trouble, for you are welcome to that copy, if you are in earnest."

"But I really must n't rob you."

The author laughed. "You need n't fear that. One is n't paid anything for that kind of stuff, but they give one all the copies one wants. Anything to get rid of them, is the way they look at it, judging from the difficulty I have in getting people to accept copies."

"If you are in earnest, of course I 'll take it gladly, and be very much obliged indeed; and I know papa will be glad to see it, too, for he—"

The thanks of the girl were cut short here by the intermittent cook, who once more entered.

"An' whativer shall we do, sor?" she demanded crossly. "Here 's that baste Richards lyin' on the intry flure, an' not wan move can Oi git 'm to make, an'

now Oi foind he has n't aven set the ta-able."

The man on the sofa laughed, half amusedly and half disgustedly. "It 's lucky for me that you did n't accept my invitation. The Fates are determined, you see, that we are neither of us to have any dinner."

"An' sure it 's not as bad as that," comforted the servant, "for it 's mesilf will set the ta-able in the dinin'-room for ye, or this little wan in here, just as ye desoide, Misther Murchison."

"Very well; give it to me here."

"An' perhaps ye 'll be clearin' off that ta-able, miss, whoile Oi 'm afther gittin' the plates," calmly suggested the maid.

"I won't have such impertinence,

" 'Oh, aunty,' cried the girl, springing to her feet"

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Monica," began the master angrily, "and —"

"But I will gladly," acquiesced Lydia, rising.

"Nonsense! I 'll not have you do anything of the kind," indignantly asserted the man.

"And how will you prevent me?" laughed Lydia, saucily, busy in clearing away the books and other things on the table.

"I won't have you wait on me, or do my servant's bidding," he protested.

"Why, I often set the table at home," explained the girl, "and I really enjoy it, for I make it look so much nicer than Hannah ever does that even papa notices the difference. And I always do it when

we are to have company. Shall I put the table by the sofa or by the easy-chair?"

"By the chair, please," requested Mr. Murchison, resignedly though amused. "But pray don't let my wishes interfere with any preference you may have. I'm well used to the position of submissive mastership."

"In that case I'm going to move them both over here, nearer the fire — or what might be one if it were properly mended," announced the girl, really interested and on her mettle. She put the furniture as indicated, and then with the tongs changed the positions of the smoldering, smoking logs, placed two new ones artfully in exactly the right

spots, and brushed up the hearth into tidiness, just as the fire burst out into flames that lighted up and cheered the hitherto rather gloomy-looking room.

"That's delightful!" exclaimed Mr. Murchison, admiringly. "I wish you'd show my servants how to make a fire; for all they ever give is just an aggravation of one."

"It's only a bed of embers, a good big back log, and plenty of air — oh, I forgot I was instructing a chemist — plenty of O_2. I always like to think of fire as the ancients did, before you dreadful scientists took all the poetry out of it, as a god, or element, separate from but imprisoned in everything. Many and many a night I can't go to sleep until my fire is

all burned out, but just lie and watch the flame or spirit escape from its prison. And if I were a poet, my first endeavor would be to try to write some great epic on it, and so put the poetry back."

"And why so unjustly leave out the scientist?" responded Mr. Murchison. "Surely he or his works could be included. Let me see if I can't suggest a stanza or two. Yes:

> "'The Baltimore heater
> Makes many lives sweeter.'"

"Oh, don't!" pleaded Lydia.

"Ah, ha! So you must beg of the poor scientists, after all? But after your base attack on them I'll show no mercy. Listen to this:

"'How dreary, cold, and strange
Is the home without a—'"

Crash! jingle! jingle! jingle! came a succession of sounds, cutting short the rhymester.

"Don't be alarmed," hastily said Mr. Murchison, reassuringly, as Lydia jumped. "That is merely the usual announcement that a bachelor's dinner is approaching, though I do think Monica might have let me complete my jingle before so utterly eclipsing it with hers."

"It is too bad!" cried Lydia, regretfully.

"Which? — for I'm afraid my doggerel is the worse of the two. Well, Monica, is there enough left for one meal?" he asked, as the cook appeared, her

arms laiden with napery, china, and silver.

"Arrah, Misther Murchison, an' it was just two plates an' some silver which fell off the dresser av thimselves while Oi was r'achin' for the glasses, an' it froighted me so, bad cess to it! that Oi dhropped two goblets, an' small blame to me that Oi did n't dhrop more." She set her burden on the table with an air of conscious self-approval, and as she retired said: "Theer, miss, whoile ye spread the cloth, Oi 'll be bringin' in the rest."

"You are now paying the penalty of having sided with Monica against me a moment ago, for she clearly considers you as an ally, if not a minion. But it 's

your own fault if you pay the least attention to her bidding."

"It really amuses me," answered the girl, gaily, as she deftly unfolded and settled the cloth into place, and arranged silver and china quickly and quietly in their positions.

"You 'd better set two places while you are about it," advised the man, "for I see Monica has brought the china and silver for it, so she evidently intends that you shall dine with me."

"An' av coorse she will, an' not be foolish," asserted the cook, reëntering with goblets and wine-glasses. "Sure, don't be stiff and silly, miss, but do as the masther bids ye."

With slightly heightened color, and

with hands not quite so quick and dexterous as before, Lydia set another place opposite the one completed, while the maid deposited the glass upon the table.

"Oi think that 's all to begin wid," she said, taking stock of the table.

"Can't you — have n't you something to ornament it with — a centrepiece — flowers — silver?" asked Lydia. "It looks so bare."

"I 'm afraid you are asking too much of a bachelor's house. How is it, Monica?"

"Nary a cinterpace have we; but theer 's a silver moog might do."

"Never mind; this will answer," said Lydia, taking a small vase from the mantel and putting it on the table. This

done she took from the front of her gown a bunch of violets. "There, could Richards have done that better?" she asked, giving her hands a little clap of triumph.

By the aid of the crutches the invalid had once again got upon his feet, and then across the space to the table. "That is charming," he declared, "and I only wish Richards had half your skill. If ever a Good Samaritan deserved a dinner, I think you do."

"An' shall I dish up, sor?" inquired the cook.

"You will take your orders from Miss — excuse me, but I really think I ought to know your name."

"Lydia Greenough."

"Thank you. This is Miss Greenough's dinner, Monica, and you will take your orders from her."

"Then you may serve dinner," directed Lydia; and as the cook departed and the two took their seats at the little table she went on naïvely: "Do you know, I've always had such a longing to be the mistress of a house, if only for a week, and so you can't imagine what fun this is to me."

"I should think a week would be enough to cure you of the desire, and I suspect one meal at this house will."

"On the contrary," replied Lydia, smiling, "what I have seen has had the directly opposite effect."

"I don't see why."

"Because there is such a lot to do," laughed Lydia. "I'm afraid that is very rude under the circumstances," she added, with a shade of contrition, "but there are five of us girls, besides mama, and it's a tiny house, so there is never enough work to go round; and if there's anything particularly nice, such as buying something new, or rearranging a room, or making jelly, why, it is n't fair for me to have it, because I'm the youngest. You know, sometimes I'm fairly desperate, I seem to be of so little use."

"Except when you set the table," suggested Mr. Murchison, smiling.

"Yes; and papa lets me keep his dispensary in order."

"Oh, so that's how you came to study chemistry, is it?"

"Yes; and then I hope to use it later on."

"And how will you do that?" asked her vis-à-vis, smiling indulgently.

"I want to get a position as teacher in a school, and I thought that the more things I knew the better my chance would be."

The dialogue was broken here by the arrival of Monica, bearing in each hand a plate of soup, which she duly placed before the two, and both, really hungry, began upon it, only to discover, with the first sip, that its temperature was as far from suggesting the fire as it was the refrigerator.

"Really, Monica," protested the host, "I think you might give us our soup warm enough to be eatable."

"An' wid nary a hot plate, an' me carryin' it from the kitchen clear up here," retorted the maid indignantly. "Sick Oi am thryin' to plase yez, an' Oi gives notice now that Oi—"

"It's very nicely flavored and not a bit greasy," put in Lydia, soothingly; "and I don't wonder it is n't quite hot enough, considering all the circumstances."

"Thank ye kindly, miss," replied the cook, softening a little at the praise, "an' it's yeself knows how it is wid a poor, lone woman workin' herself to skin an' bones," — Monica weighed two

hundred if she weighed a pound — "thryin' to suit a lot of ungrateful, complainin' men, as nothin' will satisfy but — "

"You might get us some bread, now, and also the champagne, Monica," interjected Mr. Murchison, mildly.

"Nary step more — " began the servant.

"Oh yes, Monica," broke in Lydia, persuasively; "can't you get us some bread?"

"An' if Oi do, 't will be for ye, an' not thim as spends their toime complainin'," muttered the servant, still belligerent; but she departed on the suggested errand.

"It is lucky for me that I told Monica

this was your dinner, for I fear that otherwise we should go hungry. I wish you'd tell me how you do it."

"Oh, servants are easy enough," replied Lydia, speaking as if she were used to a houseful of them. "You only want to remember that they are children," she explained, "and that they'll do anything for you if they are fond of you, and nothing if they are n't. It's a quality I admire in them; it's so honest."

"Evidently you are a born housekeeper."

"Yes, I believe I am," acknowledged the girl simply; "for I love everything about a house, and my dream has always been to have one of my own to take care of and fuss over, and where everything

would be just as I wanted it. I can't imagine anything more interesting."

Mr. Murchison smiled at Lydia's enthusiasm. "It's a pity we can't exchange places, for I have the house and never give it the least attention. Now, honestly, do you think my lot enviable?"

Lydia shook her head as she glanced about the room. "You could n't have arranged things worse," she said, "and I don't see how you can stand it. Do you know," she went on, dropping her voice to a confidential pitch, "that ever since I lighted the lamp I've been trying not to look at the mantel; yet I can't keep my eyes away from it."

"Mantel? What's the matter with the mantel?"

"Why, the magenta lambrequin and that beautiful Pompeian red bowl."

"It is a beauty, is n't it?" responded the owner. "I bought it in Naples of —"

"But, oh, would you mind if I moved it somewhere else?" begged Lydia.

"Do anything you want with it, if the sight of it troubles you."

"I only want to get it away from that particular color," explained Lydia, rising and shifting the object of conversation to the top of a book-shelf. "There, that's such a relief, is n't it?"

"I suppose it is, since you say so," acknowledged the man. "You see — well, this is only a rented house, and most of the furniture is n't mine, and I

spend virtually all my time at the factory or in my laboratory up-stairs, so it didn't seem worth while to do much."

"But magenta and red!" sighed Lydia, with a slight shiver.

"Probably it's wrong, and if I paid more attention to the house no doubt it would go better, for I confess everything just messes along, and I'm a fool to tolerate it. But I'm a busy man, and I hate all the little details like poison, and so I even put up with bad servants rather than go through the trouble of —" There the householder checked himself as Monica entered, bearing a plate of bread and a champagne-cooler.

"I was looking forward to a lonely

and very dull Christmas Eve," said Mr. Murchison, as he took the bottle from its icy repository and began twisting the cork, "and so I thought I'd try and make it a little festive by this — with rather disastrous results, as you have seen. It was an unlucky chance for you, but I hope a glass of it will lessen your disappointment over the 'dinner-party' a little." As he talked, the cork came out with a clear *pop*, and he poured a few drops into his own glass.

"Do you know, I've never tasted champagne, and I've been very curious to know what it's like. It was one of the things I was looking forward to at the dinner."

Mr. Murchison had begun to fill

Lydia's glass, but he halted. "You've never drunk champagne before?" he inquired.

"No. I suppose it's very countrified, but I never have."

"Then I'm going to advise you not to make a beginning this evening," he counseled.

"Of course I won't, if you think best," acceded the girl.

"It sounds rather inhospitable, the more so that I can't give any reason why I advise it; but — probably you'll understand me when I put it in the feminine form and say that it's a feeling and not a reason," explained the host, as he put the bottle back in the cooler without even filling up his own glass.

"But that need n't prevent your having some," said Lydia.

"Thank you, but the 'feeling' includes me as well; so you see that it is at least impartial. The fact is, if I had stopped to think, I'd never have told Monica to bring it."

"But it makes me feel bad to think that you are depriving yourself," said Lydia; "and it does n't keep, does it?"

"Not over-well," answered Mr. Murchison, biting his lip.

"Then please don't waste it on my account," she urged.

"It can't be said to have been wasted, because it has indirectly saved me from a very solitary dinner, and has given me my cheer in a pleasanter form. That's

rather a selfish way of speaking, I suppose, but I 'm not going to pretend that your loss has n't been my gain."

"It 's very kind of you to say such nice things," responded the girl, brightening, "and I only hope you really mean them, and are not merely trying to make me feel comfortable."

"I should imagine that my earlier treatment would have convinced you that, whatever else, I am not in the habit of letting my feelings and my words differ. Well, Monica," he went on, as the maid reappeared, "what further delicacy have you for us?"

"This is a chicken-poy, sor, an' this peraties," she catalogued, as she banged them, one by one, on the table. Then

she caught up the soup-plates, and with an "Oi'll be bringin' ye war-rm plates an' some cor-rn in wan minute," she retired.

It must be confessed that the pie-crust was dried to a state of hardness that made its cutting difficult, and its eating still more so, but the diners were too hungry to be critical, and Lydia brought smiles into the servant's face by warmly praising each dish.

"'T 'is yesilf knows what 's what," said Monica, reciprocating the praise.

"I don't know what you 've done to my cook," remarked Mr. Murchison in one of her absences; "I 've never seen her so good-tempered and willing."

"One can do so much more in this

world by praise than by criticism, and it 's so much better for one's own nature, as well as comfort," remarked the sage of eighteen.

"I wish you 'd tell me why, since you are so fond of housekeeping and are so well fitted for it, you prefer to be a teacher," inquired her host.

"I don't prefer," replied the girl, frankly, "but I think it right. Our village is so small that there is very little practice, and there are such a lot of us that I made up my mind I ought to try to support myself."

"And have you ever taught?"

"No. The school committee would have given me the sixth district school this autumn, but papa thought I was too

young, and made me wait till next spring. Of course I hope to get a better place some day, where I can teach interesting things; but it 's awfully nice to begin that way, because it 's only four miles from Millersville, and so I can live at home."

"I wonder if you 'll mind telling me what your pay will be?"

"Twenty dollars a month. Is n't it splendid?"

"And for that you walk eight miles every day, as well as teach?"

"Of course; for eight miles is nothing, and in good weather I 'll go on the bicycle — that is, whenever one of my sisters does n't want to use it. And if it rains or snows very badly, I 've agreed on a

price with Mrs. Springer, who lives very near the school, so that I may stay with her whenever — why do you look like that?" she broke in.

"Like what?"

"Why — I don't know exactly — but you were — well, if it had been in a car, I should term it staring."

"Yes, I suppose I was," acknowledged Mr. Murchison, "and I beg your pardon. The truth is, I was making a discovery. Indeed, I might say I was making two."

"And what were they?"

"The first one was that I'm a fool; which resulted from my second one, that for years I have been thinking that a certain variety of the *genus homo* was extinct, merely because it was not to be

met with in the city, while all the time it was flourishing in its natural habitat."

"I'm afraid I don't understand you."

Whether Mr. Murchison would have explained was not to be known, for a second time the down-stairs bell jangled, and both became listeners, eager to know what it might foretoken. Their ears were first greeted, once the bell had been answered, by the murmur of voices, and then, as before, by the sound of footsteps on the stairs, but this time far more ponderous ones.

"That sounds like Monica's alleged cousin," remarked the host, and his surmise was quickly verified, for, preceded by the cook, there presently appeared a burly policeman, hat in hand, both that

and his shoulders well covered with snow.

"Good avenin' to ye," he said, with a pleasant smile at the two diners, "an Mrs. Mooney was tellin' me that ye were afther wantin' a kerridge."

"Yes; and if you can get us one, I'll be very much obliged."

"Oi don't know as Oi can, for 't is a bad noigt, but Oi 'll do me best; an' aven if they won't sind out no cab, 't is loikely they won't moind sindin' a sleigh."

"It was foolish of me not to think of that," exclaimed Mr. Murchison, "though," he went on, checking himself, "I 'm afraid you are hardly garbed for that."

"Yes, I am," asserted Lydia. "My

cloak is as warm as warm can be, and I never take cold. Anything they 'll send will do, really."

"An' wheer do ye want it to go to?" questioned the roundsman.

"To 4 West Fifty-sixth," spoke up Lydia.

"Sure, 'tis not loikely they 'll moind such a little trip," said the officer.

"Tell them I 'll pay extra for it," directed Mr. Murchison; "and there 'll be something for you, if you can help us."

"Thank ye, sir; but that's not needed," replied the man, turning to go.

"We 'll settle that later on. Come back, anyway, for something to eat

and a glass of champagne," continued Mr. Murchison, pleasantly. "And, by the by, how is Monica's niece?" he inquired, smiling.

"Phwat niece?" asked the putative relative.

"Sure, whose niece should it be," broke in Monica, "but Mary, as ye promised to bring me word av this very avenin'? Is her cold betther?"

"Ah, go 'long wid yere jokin'," retorted the man. "Oi don't know what ye're pokin' at me, but Oi don't bite on no rubber sandwich, not me."

"Go 'long wid yeself," snapped the cook, crossly. "Go git the carriage, an' don't shtand wastin' toime here."

Suiting her action to her advice, she

caught him by the arm and half shoved, half led him through the doorway.

"Oh, do you think he can get it?" asked Lydia.

"For a certainty; so put yourself quite at your ease."

"That 's such a relief," sighed the girl.

"It is to me as well, for I was worrying over what we should do, having little hope that Monica would succeed any better than Richards."

As if the uttering of the name had exorcised some spell, the butler entered, or rather sneaked into, the room, a spectacle indeed, for from his head, which was a mop of wet, bedraggled hair, were dripping little streams of water, which

ran down an already well-soaked coat and shirt-front.

"I beg pardon, sir, about dinner," he said, still with a thick utterance and blinking confusedly, "but I wash taken bad and — "

"What have you been doing to get so wet?" demanded the master.

"Yes, sir — I — it — I wash taken faint, sir, an' — an' when I recovershed, the offish — the offish —" the man abandoned the difficult word — "the poleesh — the poleesh — " again he gave up the attempt — "a friend wash holdin' my head under the fashet, an' then I remembered about dinner."

"Well, we don't want you," said Mr. Murchison, sternly, "and you will go to

your room at once, and not show yourself again to-night. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," meekly answered the servant, only too glad to hasten from the room.

Barely had he disappeared when a bell clanged, this time not the familiar jingle of the basement door, but the sharp, clear note of a gong, and the next instant the sound of the opening of the front door was heard. This was succeeded by a murmur of voices, and then by a rustle of a woman's skirts, and suddenly Mrs. Travers came to a halt in the doorway.

"Lydia!" was all she said, but the tone and the horrified look in her face told the rest.

"Oh, aunty," cried the girl, springing to her feet, "I'm so glad! How good of you to come! But how did you know?"

"Put on your cloak at once and come with me," directed her aunt, sharply.

"Oh, aunty, won't you please let me tell you how it all happened, and introduce —"

"Not a word, Lydia; but do as I tell you," ordered Mrs. Travers.

With some difficulty, for the crutches were out of reach, Mr. Murchison rose to his feet, and said:

"I trust you will let me explain how little Miss Greenough is in fault in what I can see you both misjudge and blame."

"My niece, sir, can tell me all I wish

to know," she replied as icily as could be, "and I do not choose to stay here an instant longer than we must. Come, Lydia," she said to the girl, who had hastily thrown on her wrap, as she moved away from the door.

"Yes, aunty," came a frightened acquiescence. Then she held out to her host a hand that trembled. "Thank you, thank you, oh, so much, for being so kind to me, and please don't think—"

"Lydia," called her aunt impatiently from the hall; and leaving her sentence unfinished, the girl added an "Oh, forgive my not saying all I want to!" even as she ran after her aunt.

Finally getting to his crutches, Mr. Murchison hobbled to the door, just in

time to see the butler close the front one. "Did you answer the bell just now, Richards?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, sir; I wash jush goin' upshtairs when I hearsh it."

"And what did the lady say?"

"She ashks for young lady, sir, an' I tells her she dinin' wish you in back room, an' then she hurrish down hall wishout ashking permission."

"Very well. Go to bed."

The order given, Mr. Murchison limped back to the center of the room, and stood there leaning on his crutches. The fire had died down, the unfinished meal was on the table, the chairs were askew, on the lounge was the shawl in an untidy heap; everything seemed dis-

" He . . . took up the little vase of violets, and raised them to his face "

(See page 97)

Howard Chandler Christy. 1902.

ordered and uncomfortable. Yet only a moment before it had all seemed pleasant and cheery. He slowly looked about, and the wall-paper, the carpet, the furniture, even the colors, grated upon him, though never before had he so much as noticed any of them.

"Allan Murchison," he said aloud, "you are a fool."

Having eased his mind, he did a like service to his body, by a shrug of the shoulders; then he stumped to the table, took up the little vase of violets, and raised them to his face, but whether to nose or lips was not clear,

"And having discovered it, it's your own fault if you remain one," he ended.

AND Lydia?

She had followed after her aunt, pausing only to snatch up her bag, and with it she staggered down the steps, regardless of dress or safety.

"Get in before me!" she was ordered, and then the one word, "Home," was called to the coachman as her aunt entered the carriage and banged the door.

"Oh, aunty, please, please don't speak to me so!" begged the girl. "Do let me explain how—"

"Explain!" cried Mrs. Travers. "Explain your drinking champagne with a strange man in a strange house!"

"I did n't touch a drop," protested the girl, "and neither—"

"Lydia, Lydia! It's all too terrible! And to think what would have happened if Mrs. Curtis had not telephoned me, asking me where you were! That such a horrible thing should — "

"Oh, there was nothing wrong! It was a dreadful mistake, my getting to the wrong house, but — "

"And that you should stay there a minute in such a place — why, that dreadful-looking, drunken brute at the door should have prevented you from even entering it. And then your actually sitting down to dinner with a man — "

"But I did n't, aunty, until I had found he was a gentleman."

"Gentleman! That creature in a

smoking-jacket, who takes such advantage of a young, ignorant, and silly girl! Gentleman, indeed!"

"He is, really he is, aunty, as you'd know if you'd only let me tell you all about it. And you must have seen what a fine face he had."

"With his hair all rumpled and in disorder."

"That was because he had been lying down and—"

"Hush, child! Not another word, for you only make it worse. Nobody knows, for Thomas of course thinks he brought you to the right house, and I'll manage some explanation to Mrs. Curtis; but, oh, what can I say to your father and mother?"

"I will tell them all about it, aunty, and they will not blame either of us," said Lydia, with quiet dignity.

"Child, child, how can you be so blind! Don't you see what a dreadful thing it has been? No, no! I don't want to hear anything about it. The harm's done, and it can't be bettered by anything that can be said."

And so her aunt talked until Lydia, ceasing her attempts to justify herself, broke down, and, her beautiful dress forgotten, sobbed and sobbed until the house was reached. There, at the command of her monitor, she hastily dried her eyes, and with the hood of her cloak held about her face to hide the tear-stains from the footman, she fled past

him, and up-stairs to her room. Longing only for a chance really to vent her grief, she closed and locked the door, and then threw herself upon the bed and wept and wept.

THE breakfast-hour at the Traverses', Christmas morning, was at nine o'clock, and Lydia brought to it a very pale face and very red eyes, and she showed such listlessness and want of appetite that Mr. Travers, who at first was wholly absorbed in narrating how the snow had impeded his getting up-town to such an extent that he was held in an elevated train over four hours and did not reach home till after eleven, finally forgot his own troubles long enough to comment upon her.

"Your first dinner seems to have done you up pretty badly, little girl," he said. "Ah, country folk can't stand up to the racket that the city ones do. However, cheer up, for I've a nice present for you in the library. And here's another, I'll be bound," he added, as Morland appeared and handed her a package.

"He's to wait for an answer," the servant announced.

Slowly Lydia unknotted the string and opened it. Within were two letters, and — she flushed suddenly as, lifting them, she found underneath, the familiar "Chemisch-Technisches Repertorium."

"Hello!" exclaimed her uncle. "What's all this blushing about? Let's see your printed valentine, Lydia."

Without a word the girl handed him the magazine, and then looked at her two letters. One was without any inscription on the envelope; the second was addressed to her. Breaking it open she read as follows:

Christmas morning.

DEAR MISS GREENOUGH: — I fear that unintentionally I have been the cause of your being blamed, and as I deserve any that is deserved, I have written in the enclosed envelop a full explanation of the circumstances, which should save you, at least, from all criticism. Will you kindly hand it to your aunt, with an apology for the fact that, not knowing her name, I cannot properly direct it?

I also send you the magazine, in the hope that your leaving it behind was due to the suddenness of your departure, and not to a desire of escaping from it.

My doctor has been to see me this morning, and I told him that I would consent to be a "lounger" no longer. My insistence has led him to put the ankle in a plaster jacket, and I can now get about with one crutch better than I could yesterday with two, and so I write this to ask permission to call upon you this afternoon, partly that I may justify our conduct to your aunt, and partly in the hope that I may renew an acquaintance I should like to continue and strengthen.

Sincerely yours,

ALLAN MURCHISON.

"Well, I can't say much for your Christmas present, Lydia," laughed Mr. Travers. "Who sent it to you?"

"It is from Mr. Murchison," replied the girl quietly. Then she turned to her aunt. "Here is a letter from him which he asks me to give to you, and this is his letter to me. Will you

please tell me what answer I ought to make?"

"Not the Murchison who writes this article?" queried her uncle.

"Yes."

"Pray how did you come to know Allan Murchison?"

"I met him last night," said Lydia, slightly shivering.

"And he sends you a letter and a magazine before ten this morning! Good. You evidently made a conquest at your first dinner, little girl, and a good one at that. I'm sure you liked him."

"Do you know anything about him, Charles?" demanded Mrs. Travers, looking up with surprise.

"Well, rather! He's the consulting

chemist of the Standard Chemical Company, and sometimes he 's called into our board meetings."

"Indeed!" said the wife, showing more interest. "And — and what kind of position is that?"

"Oh, a very responsible and important one."

"No. I mean, is it well paid?"

Mr. Travers laughed.

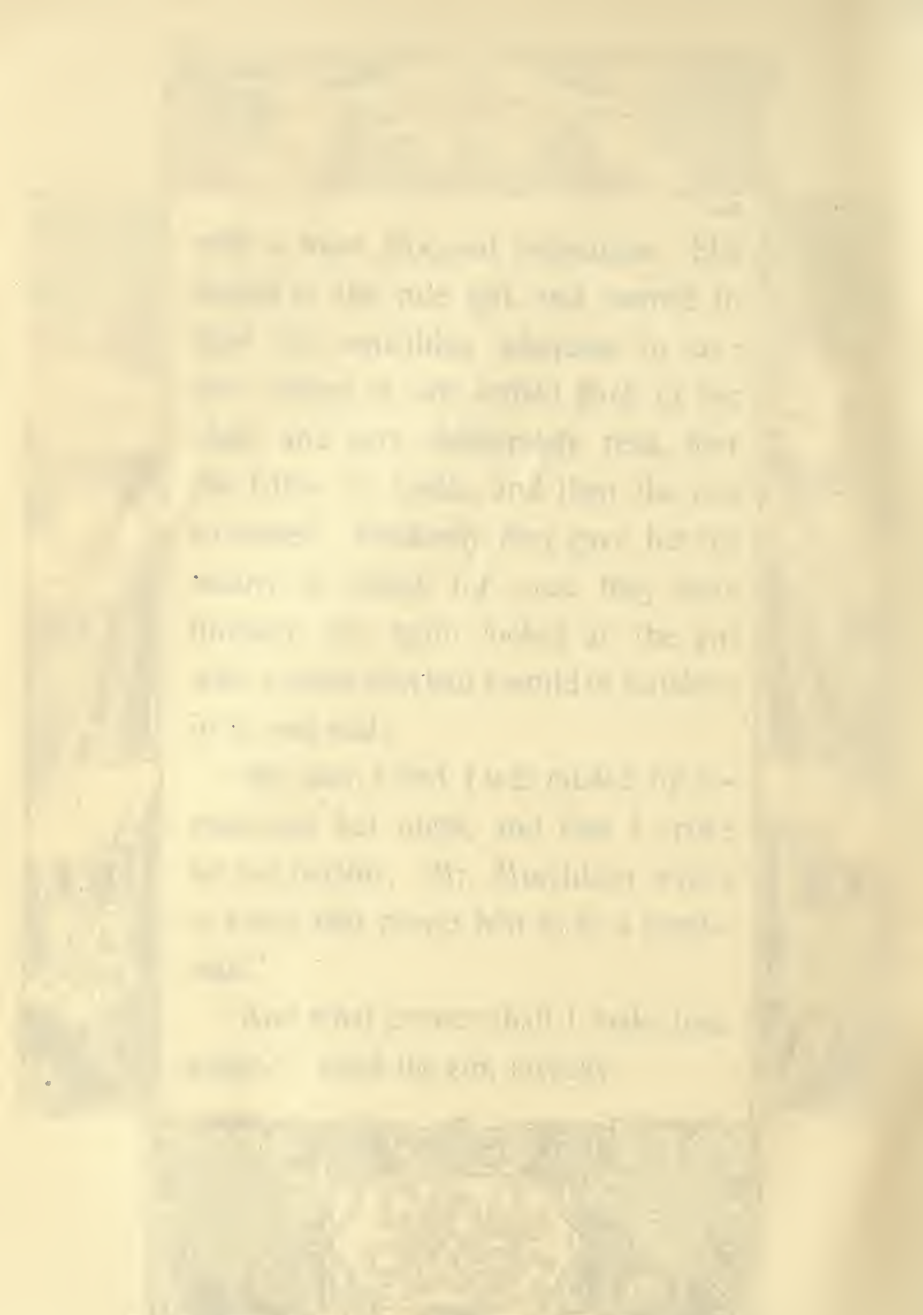
"We pay him thirty thousand a year, which our president says is n't enough, and I 've heard that he earns as much more out of the royalties for some discoveries he 's made. I know he 's one of our large stockholders, and that does n't tend to poverty."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Travers,

with a most eloquent intonation. She looked at the pale girl, and seemed to hunt for something adequate to say; not finding it, she settled back in her chair, and very deliberately read, first the letter to Lydia, and then the one to herself. Evidently they gave her the means of retreat, for, once they were finished, she again looked at the girl with a smile that had a world of sunshine in it, and said:

"My dear, I find I was misled by appearances last night, and that I spoke far too harshly. Mr. Murchison writes in a way that proves him to be a gentleman."

"And what answer shall I make him, aunty?" cried the girl, joyfully.



"'But he asks if he may call,' Lydia reminded her aunt"

(See page 109)

Harrison Chandler Christy. 1902

Mrs. Travers hesitated.

"Write him your thanks, child; nothing more."

"But he asks if he may call," Lydia reminded her aunt, shyly but anxiously.

"Yes, my dear; but you need n't say anything about that — because I shall send him a letter by the same messenger, asking him to eat his Christmas dinner with us, so that we may thank him for all he did for you."

AND to this day Allan Murchison often speaks of his wife as "My Christmas Present."

1672
Bon Noel

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